

Ontario

Women's

Directorate

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# Women in the Labour Force “Child Care”

No. 4 in a series of factsheets produced by  
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## INTRODUCTION

In the traditional view of the family unit, child-rearing was considered to be the primary responsibility of the mother, who cared for them in the family home while the father worked in paid employment. This view is changing, however, as increasing numbers of two-parent families are characterized by the presence of both husband and wife in the labour force. In Ontario in 1984, of the 538,000 families with pre-school age children (defined as children under 6 years of age) 164,000, or 30.5% were couples in which the husband was employed and the wife also held a full-time job.<sup>1</sup> If wives who work part-time are also included then the number of families increases to 238,000 or 44.2%.<sup>2</sup>

The growth in the number of lone-parent families is also altering the traditional view of the family unit. Between 1951 and 1984 the number of lone-parent families in Ontario more than doubled reaching 205,000 in 1984.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, projections for Canada indicate that single-parent households will increase by 84% by the year 2000.<sup>4</sup> The majority of lone-parent families are headed by women, and 1984 data for Ontario indicate a labour force participation rate for this group of 61.6%.

(The participation rate is defined as the percentage of the population, or, in this case, the percentage of a specific group within that population, i.e. female single-parents, who are in the labour force). In addition, a significant increase in the number of male-headed lone-parent families is also expected. It is estimated that the number of single-parent families headed by men will increase nationally to 180,000 or 1.6% of all households by the end of this century.<sup>5</sup>

Economic forecasts indicate that the participation rate of women in the labour force will continue to grow – a pattern which is seen by many economists as crucial to the future economic development of the country.<sup>6</sup> This growth includes increasing numbers of women with young children who are remaining in or re-entering the labour force. If projections for increases in the size of the female labour force over the next two decades are realized, one can assume at least a proportionate increase in the number of couples where both partners work. Such increases, in conjunction with the growth in the number of lone-parent families, are likely to bring an increase in demand for child care facilities.

The traditional view of the family, which held that women primarily are responsible for the care of their own children, contributed to the belief that child care is a ‘women’s issue’ and, therefore, a ‘women’s responsibility’. In a two-parent family, however, where both husband and wife are in the work force, child care must be seen as a parental responsibility. When women worked to produce goods and services in the home, child care was one of their many functions. However, when they join the paid labour force, it can no longer be assumed that women will maintain all of their former responsibilities in addition to assuming new ones.

Another point of interest in an examination of changing family structures is the development of alternative work arrangements, which may be required to enable working parents to effectively combine the responsibilities of work and family. It is possible that in response to the needs of working mothers and fathers in our society, options such as job-sharing, flexible working hours and compressed work weeks will become a pattern for the future. Acknowledgement of the child-rearing responsibilities of both parents has also initiated discussions regarding the provision of parental leave for the care of young children. Such arrangements would allow either parent the option of a leave of absence to care for a young child or could, perhaps, provide parents with the opportunity to share this responsibility.

Whatever the solutions, it is evident that society must adapt to the changing structure of family units.

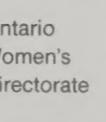
## WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE

The number of Ontario women working outside the home has increased dramatically in the past two decades.

**TABLE ONE\***  
Women in the Ontario Labour Force  
and their Participation Rates

Number	Participation Rates	
663,000	1960	31%
1,106,000	1970	41%
1,818,000	1980	54%
1,883,000	1981	56%
1,924,000	1982	56%
1,971,000	1983	56%
2,026,000	1984	57%

\*All statistical data are from Statistics Canada, The Labour Force, Catalogue 71-001 (annual averages), unless otherwise noted.



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This growth, as illustrated in Table One, is reflected in the labour force activity of all age groups. In Ontario in 1984, 74.7% of women aged 20-44 were in the labour force. These years, often referred to as the chief child-rearing years, were, at one time, associated with a temporary or even permanent retirement from the labour force. In the last 20 years, however, there has been a dramatic reversal of this pattern.

Approximately 80% of all children born in North America are born to women between the ages of 20 and 34<sup>9</sup> and the participation rate for women in Ontario in this age group has grown from 43.7% in 1966 to almost 75% in 1984 – an increase of 71.6%.

At the same time, there has been a substantial increase in the participation rate of married women in the labour force. In 1951, only 15% of married women in Ontario worked outside the home. This figure doubled to 31.6% in 1966, and by 1984, 57.4% of married women were in the labour force. Also, it is interesting to note that today, 61.5%, or three-fifths, of working women are married.<sup>10</sup>

#### MOTHERS IN THE LABOUR FORCE

The patterns of female labour force participation have changed over the last 20 years. It can no longer be assumed that a woman will work only until she marries or has her first child. In 1984, there were 270,000 women in the Ontario labour force with at least one child under 16. Tables Two and Three show the increase over a nine-year period in the labour force activity of women with children. The 1984 data indicate that the participation rate for women in Ontario with at least one child under six was 59.1%.<sup>10</sup> By far the greatest increase occurred among women with at least one child under three years of age; by 1984, over half the mothers with a child under three in Ontario was a wage earner.

TABLE TWO\*\*

Participation Rates of Women in the Ontario Labour Force by Presence of Children, by Age of Youngest Child, 1975, 1980 and 1984<sup>11</sup>

Age of Youngest Child	1975	1980	1984	Participation Rate
Under 3	36.6%	47.9%	56.5%	
3-5 years	46.2%	56.2%	63.4%	
6-15 years	55.0%	64.2%	69.7%	
Under 6 years	40.6%	51.3%	59.1%	
Under 16	48.0%	58.2%	64.6%	

In 1975, 57% of single, divorced or widowed women with children under 16 were in the labour force. This rate had increased to over 69% by 1980 and remained at approximately 69% until 1984.

TABLE THREE\*\*  
Women in the Ontario Labour Force  
by Presence of Children,  
by Age of Youngest Child, 1975, 1980 and 1984<sup>12</sup>

Age of Youngest Child	1975	1980	1984	Number of Women
Under 3	116,000	147,000	184,000	
3-5 years	104,000	122,000	131,000	
6-15 years	318,000	381,000	405,000	
Total	538,000	650,000	720,000	

Although the age categories are somewhat different, data from a 1973 study, when compared to the figures in Tables Two and Three, illustrate the extent to which the labour force activity of women with children has increased.

TABLE FOUR  
Women in the Ontario Labour Force  
by Presence of Children for Women Ages 20-54  
by Age of Youngest Child, 1973<sup>13</sup>

Age of Youngest Child	Number Women in Labour Force	Participation Rate
Under 2 years	59,000	26.7%
2-5 years	107,000	35.3%
6-16 years	279,000	48.3%
No child under 16	528,000	69.8%
Total	973,000	52.4%

Information classed by marital status is also available on the labour force activity of women with children. In 1975, for example, 36.3% of married women with children under three were in the labour force. By 1984, 57 of every 100 such mothers were working outside the home.

TABLE FIVE\*\*  
Participation Rates of Married Women  
in the Ontario Labour Force,  
by Age of Youngest Child, 1975, 1980 and 1984<sup>14</sup>

Age of Youngest Child	1975	1980	1984	Participation Rate
Under 3	36.3%	47.9%	51.1%	
3-5 years	45.7%	54.4%	63.1%	
6-15 years	54.1%	63.0%	69.0%	
Total	47.2%	57.0%	64.2%	

In 1975, 57% of single, divorced or widowed women with children under 16 were in the labour force. This rate had increased to over 69% by 1980 and remained at approximately 69% until 1984.

Participation Rates of Women in the Ontario Labour Force by Presence of Children, by Age of Youngest Child, 1975, 1980 and 1984<sup>11</sup>

Age of Youngest Child	1975	1980	1984	Participation Rate
Under 3	36.6%	47.9%	56.5%	
3-5 years	46.2%	56.2%	63.4%	
6-15 years	55.0%	64.2%	69.7%	
Under 6 years	40.6%	51.3%	59.1%	
Under 16	48.0%	58.2%	64.6%	

TABLE SIX\*\*  
Participation Rates of Single, Widowed or  
Divorced Women in the Ontario Labour Force,  
by Presence of Children, 1975, 1980 and 1984<sup>15</sup>

Age of Youngest Child	1975	1980	1984	Participation Rate
Under 3 years	41.2%	46.7%	47.4%	
3-5 years	52.9%	70.8%	66.5%	
6-15 years	62.7%	73.9%	74.0%	
Total	57.0%	69.4%	68.5%	

\*Data refer to women who are heads or spouses of heads of an economic family. A family is defined as a group of two or more persons who are living together in the same dwelling and who are related by blood, marriage or adoption.

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